

September 25, 2022

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 16:19-31

Many of us have heard this story many times in our lives. We have come to assume that we know it well. This is the only context in how we know this story. There truly is not much more we can add to it? Our context of how we understand this story is the only one we know. The context that is before our context is very different. Buckle up!

If we were listening to Jesus actually telling this story we would be shocked. We would most likely go home and tell our spouse or parents about the insane things that we heard come out of Jesus's mouth. Jesus shocked the listener of His day. Then teased them to want to listen to some more. Our Lord was crazy as a fox in how He did this. Jesus actually did this by turning everything in the story upside down, inside out and completely opposite. Jesus really bent their understanding of reality. This is why so many thought He had a demon. This was also why His family thought He lost His mind. Jesus had neither a demon nor lost His mind.

Now that I have got your attention, let's get into this and see how Jesus bent their understanding of reality. First off, if you were wealthy during Our Lord's day, it was considered a great blessing. God looked favourably upon you and your family and blessed you with that wealth. Rich people were looked upon as great successes. They were kind and benevolent. They shared their wealth. Yet in our story this morning the rich man does not seem to be any of these things. His money which is a blessing from God has blinded him from seeing the needs of others. His money seems to be the thing that has lead him to his torment in the next life. As you could imagine this story told as Jesus did is a challenge to the listener. They would have to reconsider how they think about God, His blessings and wealth. Jesus is really forcing them out of their comfort zone.

Then there is poor Lazarus. He would be looked upon as someone who has lost God's blessing in his life. Poor people were seen as victims of something they did. They were not nice or good. They were to be avoided. They only took from society and added nothing to it.

The rich man who should have a name in this story does not have one. He should have one because of his wealth and position. Yet he is nameless. The poor person who should be nameless actually has one. He actually has God's blessing because He knows his name. Lazarus is a double couplet of the name Eleasar. They both mean God saved. So Jesus is actually saying that God saved the poor man. This also is a huge cultural turn around in this story.

Secondly, let's move on to the four legged ones in the story. Dogs were not regarded very well in Semetic culture of Our Lord's day. Actually they still are not even today. Dogs were the ones who ate Jezabel in 2 Kings 9:10. Isaiah 56:11, The places of fear are where the dogs are at. Dogs are to be avoided. In this story Jesus tells of the great qualities of dogs. Something nobody ever expected to hear when Jesus started this story. Jesus just keeps bending their realities. In the story, the dogs did not eat Lazarus as most people would have expected. The dogs had compassion on Lazarus. They were the ones who acted in a more human way than the rich man. Jesus is forcing them to think, could God act through a dog and provide comfort and relief to a human? Many times animals and dogs act better than we do. Jesus uses the dog, a hated animal in their culture, to shame the inaction of the rich man.

I have said in the past that the idea of an after- life is a new idea in Judaism at this time. It probably slipped into their religion from the Greeks. The order of this after-life is completely different from the physical world most Jews of that day knew. Reward is not based on wealth, but compassion and mercy. Acting according to our true nature. That being, made to love and to be loved. The things that the rich man neglected. The dogs acted according to their nature. They licked Lazarus's wounds. That is what dogs do. As you can see, Jesus sets the whole world order of His day upon its head. Everything is reversed in His bending of reality. This story forces you to re-evaluate everything you thought you knew.

I like to look at this story as a great continuation of the Good Samaritan. Another story that really turned things upside down. Samaritans are not supposed to be good. Remember the question in that story when Jesus asked, "Who was the neighbor to the man that fell in among the thieves? They answered, the one who showed him mercy and compassion." Being cheeky, I have to ask, are the dogs the Good Samaritans to Lazarus? Where is Whiskey Kintop when you need her?

When we do not act according to the nature in which we were created, bad things happen. We become blinded to the needs of those around us. Money is nice but it is not as important as people. God can work through anything to remind us to love and that we are loved. He used dogs to remind Lazarus that he was loved by God. To bring him comfort, healing and relief. A dog, the most underrated animal in Jewish society. Makes you look at them in a new light.

God's reality is not our reality. God is God, so all bets are off on what reality can be. Jesus makes that point in the story this morning. It really helps to know the context of the people when Jesus preached. It gives us a deeper appreciation of the Gospel. Have a great week,
Pastor D